



Massed Precision Fires— A New Way of Thinking

By Vincent R. Bielinski

During the Meuse-Argonne campaign (26 September to 11 November 1918), 20,000 guns firing a three-hour preparation supported the initial nine-division assault. The Field Artillery's (FA's) role was to provide close support to the maneuver forces, which it tried to accomplish through massive doses of indirect fire planned ahead in great detail and delivered with as much flexibility as communications and command and control permitted at the time. Mass was the key to success (See Donald E. Ingalls, "Artillery Innovations in WWI" *Field Artillery Journal*, September-October 1974, 54-57).

Those golden years of massing fires and honing their execution during the following decades remain a fond memory of every Artilleryman. The Capability Exercises held at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, between 1987 and 1991, for Artillery students and even for Command and General Staff College students from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, displayed the might of the Field Artillery as the fires of a dozen battalions massed on a single "Time on Target" fire mission. Maneuver commanders also were included so they could witness the awesome might of the *King of Battle*.

Everyone, even experienced Artillery commanders, left impressed.

Today's Environment. Today, however, FA no longer masses a large number of rounds fired from dozens of guns to engage targets. Modularity is one of the principle reasons. The Army no longer has the number of division artilleries or corps artilleries with several Field Artillery brigades and their subordinate battalions as in the past.

Now, most Fires battalions are organic to their brigade combat teams, and the division commander seldom takes them away from the brigade commander to mass fires. Division commanders may receive a Fires brigade to support its force, but the number and type of units within that Fires brigade is tailored to the division's mission.

The second argument against massed fires is the contemporary operations FA supports. The rules of engagement (ROE) and the requirement to minimize collateral damage in most cases prevent the employment of large amounts of ar-

tillery in an area to neutralize or destroy enemy targets.

The final "nail in the coffin" of massed fires is the development and fielding of precision munitions. There is no need to expend large amounts of "dumb" artillery rounds—those following an unaided ballistic trajectory—into an area when a single precision munition can achieve the desired effect.

But are massed fires truly consigned to history? Or is there just another way of thinking about massed fires? How can FA mass fires using precision munitions? At first, the questions seem rhetorical because of the argument that "precision weapons were the final coffin nail" of massed fires. However "how do we achieve the effects of massed fires using a small number of precision munitions" is the actual question?



Precision Guidance Kit Fuze on a 155-mm "dumb" Artillery round

Massing Precision. Instead of those 20,000 guns from the Meuse-Argonne preparation, how does FA achieve the effects desired by a single division by three or six Fires battalions? In current and near future operations, FA likely will support smaller maneuver forces, for example a combined arms battalion, a company or even a smaller unit. FA must leverage the accuracy and flexibility afforded by precision munitions. FA must accurately locate a number of enemy targets that support a maneuver operation and time the attack of these targets with precision munitions.

One example would be an operation to grab a high value individual (HVI) in a sparsely populated rural town. Intelligence identified the building where the HVI will sleep that night. The intelligence sources also identified the locations of the HVI's command post, quarters for his escort and fortified buildings that control access to and from the town.

The maneuver plan is for Soldiers to rappel from a helicopter assault onto the HVI's building and capture him along with any material he may have. Electronic attack against cell phone capabilities forestalls any early warning of the approaching friendly force. The fire support plan employs precision munitions to attack the command post, escort quarters and fortified buildings less than one minute before the assault force arrives. These precision weapons do not exceed ROE and collateral damage estimates.



Excalibur

The simultaneous attacks on the enemy forces provides the shock and surprise to enable the assault force to capture the HVI quickly, perform a hasty sensitive-site exploitation and egress. Additional precision munitions may be planned as "on call" to re-attack the barracks and fortified buildings to aid in the assault force's departure.

Consideration. Ideally, a Fires brigade would be the preeminent organization to plan and execute these precision massed fires. The Fires brigade could plan, prepare and execute the fires of Excalibur, Guided Multiple-Launch Rocket System and Non-Line-of-Sight Launch System for the supported division. These missions require detailed planning for the munitions to arrive at the specified time.

For the old massed fire missions—those that involved munitions that follow unaided ballistic trajectories—the only variable was time of flight, and each unit fired based solely on this event. For the massed precision fires missions, time of flight is not the only consideration, but also launch axis, flight path, way points and airspace deconfliction. Because the Army and FA cannot guarantee the presence

of a Fires brigade, the ability to conduct massed fires using precision munitions is a task that each Fires battalion must be able to accomplish.

Has the time of massing "dumb" artillery fires passed? Years ago, some pundits said that the Air Force's dumb bomb went the way of the dinosaurs and that only precision munitions would be used in future wars. The pundits seemed to be correct until B-52s dropped both guided munitions and large numbers of dumb bombs and changed the mind of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Other soothsayers called for the demise of the tank because future operations would never need armored vehicles. They argued the High-Mobility, Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle would be sufficient for everyone in every operation. This author does not have to tell you how that forecast turned out. FA may not conduct massed fires often in the future, but it must never lose the ability to train for and employ them.

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2009 *Fires* Photo Contest

The 1 August submission deadline for the 2009 *Fires* Photo Contest is approaching quickly. The competition is open to any military or civilian, amateur or professional photographer.

Scope and Purpose. Photos should capture images that tell the story of today's Army and Marine Field Artillerymen or Air Defenders in the War on Terrorism (WOT) or in training between 1 July 2008 and 30 June 2009. These photos may appear as a cover or other shots for future editions of the magazine, as part of the Chief of the Fires Center of Excellence poster series, calendar or in other esprit de corps or strategic communications projects.

Although entrants may submit horizontal or vertical photographs, vertical shots tend to work best for magazine covers and posters. For more information on how to take a great photo, visit our website at <http://sill-www.army.mil/firesbulletin/photographers.asp>.

Two Prize Categories—Six Prizes. A First Place prize of \$500, Second Place prize of \$200 and Third Place prize of \$75 will

be awarded in each of two categories: 1) Training for Combat/Stability Operations and 2) Actual Combat/Stability Operations. Each entrant can submit up to three photographs.

The winning photos will be published in *Fires* and posted in the magazine's Photo Gallery on our website at sill-www.army.mil/firesbulletin/.

Submissions. Submit your photos to *Fires* Bulletin via email, or compact disc (CD). CDs will not be returned. Email images to the *Fires* Bulletin at firesbulletin@conus.army.mil. Please submit only one image per email. Mark the subject line as "2009 Photo Contest/Photo #1 (2 or 3), Entry Category—Your Last Name."

For more information on the contest rules, please visit our website at <http://sill-www.army.mil/firesbulletin/contest.asp>. If you have further questions, call the *Fires* staff at DSN 639-5121/6806, commercial at (580) 442-5121/6806 or email us at firesbulletin@conus.army.mil.